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ABSTRACT

Based on Bowlby's attachment theory, which hypothesized that the caregiver-child relationship may play an important role in the social and academic adjustment of the child, this pilot study assessed the attitudes of student teachers regarding attachment issues. The subjects for this study were 38 graduate students in a teacher preparation program. Data were collected using: (1) the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) containing four indices which reflect how an individual perceives and makes judgments; and (2) the Teacher Attitude Scale (TAS), designed by the researcher to assess the individual's attitudes toward relationships with his or her students. The results revealed that student-teacher attitudes toward their relationship with students were related to the intuition component of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. The full personality profiles showed no significant relationship with the TAS total score, indicating that more factors may be at work in influencing attitudes toward relationships with children. Generalizations to the larger population were not possible due to the nature and size of the sample. While the TAS demonstrated good internal reliability, it requires additional testing before it can be utilized as an effective measure of teacher attitudes toward attachment relationships. (BAC)

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# Relationships Between Caregiver-Child Attachment Attitudes and Personality Characteristics

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## Introduction

Research on child social development suggests that the adult-child relationship is an important context for children's development. Data indicate that the quality of a child's intimate relationship with parents is predictive of their social adjustment and academic achievement in school (e.g., Bus & vanIJzendoorn 1988; Cohn, 1990; Erickson, Sroufe and Egeland, 1985; Lewis, Feiring, McGuffog, & Jaskir, 1984; Pastor, 1981; Sroufe, 1983). Bowlby's attachment theory has been used extensively as a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of parent-child relationships, and has recently been utilized in research on caregiver-child relationships[1] (Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton 1994).

Along with the parent, the child's caregiver often becomes a significant figure in a young child's life (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). The caregiver spends a substantial amount of time with the child each day, assuming many of the same roles as the parent. Yet, little is known about the effects of this relationship on a child's development. However, recent research indicates that caregiver-child relationships may be a better predictor than parent-child relationships for certain school related outcomes(Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton 1994).

## Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) theory of attachments provides a theoretical framework for understanding how intimate relationships influence the individual. Attachment theory posits that intimate relationships (especially in early childhood) have an impact on future social

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[1] For purposes of this paper, childcare provider and teacher are used interchangeably. Attachment theory has implications for all individuals who interact with children on a regular basis, whether in school or some other out of home care.

functioning. The nature and quality of the relationship that develops influences the construction of a "internal working model" of the relationship which serves as a foundation for future relationships. Quality is determined in large part by the degree to which the caregiver has been able to sensitively and appropriately respond to the attachment needs of the child.

Sensitive appropriate caregivers allow the individual to develop a secure model where others are perceived of as supportive and available when needed. Conversely, children that receive inconsistent, or rejecting care develop insecure models where little trust is put into the ability of others to provide the nurturing, and support needed by the child. Self esteem is also influenced by the attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1973, 1980).

A model of the self develops in tandem with the model of relationships and is influenced by the attachment model. Children that experience secure relationships view themselves as worthy of love, and those that experience insecure relationships see themselves as unworthy of such care and loving (Cassidy, 1988).

Bowlby believed that attachment relationships have an inherent survival value. That is, when the child is stressed or feels danger the attachment system activates and the child seeks out and elicits behaviors from the caregiver that will alleviate the stress. The child' s ability to use the attachment figure as a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1988) for exploration into the world will be hampered by an insecure attachment relationship. A child with an insecure model expects inconsistent or rejecting care from the caregiver, thus attachment needs are not met and become paramount. Exploratory behaviors are impaired as the child strives to have attachment needs satisfied.

Individuals can form attachment relationships with most other significant individuals in their lives (i.e., parents, siblings, grandparents, family friends, caregivers) using the initial relationship as a model. Attachment relationships potentially have an enormous impact on child's social development.

Thus, it has been hypothesized that the caregiver-child relationship may play an important role in the social and academic adjustment of the child. Yet systematic research in this area is lacking (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). Pianta (1994) suggests that the school-aged child negotiates the social demands of school through attachment relationships. The child brings expectations of attachment figures and attachment relationships to their classroom relationships with peers and caregivers. As the new relationship forms between caregiver and child, expectations based on past experience forecast how sensitive and supportive this new attachment figure will be.

A critical aspect in any attachment relationship is the attitudes and behavior of the individual regarding their role as an attachment figure. As mentioned previously, the sensitivity and appropriateness of caregiving behaviors is central to the quality of the attachment relationship that forms (Bowlby, 1969). Therefore, in the caregiver-child relationship attitudes and behaviors of the caregiver (as attachment figure) will guide their behaviors in this relationship. Caregivers who value and understand their role in this relationship with their students will be able to meet the attachment needs of a child adjusting to school. Thus, a sensitive caregiver can continue the successful relationships begun in early childhood or provide a compensatory relationship when the home environment is unable to provide this role.

The purpose of this study was to assess the attitudes of teacher education students regarding attachment issues and compare them to certain demographic and psychological variables. The attitude assessment survey used was created by this author and this study represents its pilot use.

## Methods

### Subjects

Subjects for this study were a convenience sample of 38 graduate level students in a teacher preparation program. All students had an undergraduate degree in a field other than education and were in an alternative preparation program to become certified teachers. Twenty-four percent were male (n=9) and 76% were female (n=29). The mean age of the sample was 29 years. Twenty-four percent of the sample were African American (n=9), 71% were Caucasian (n=27), 2% Hispanic (n=1), and 3% were other races. Seventy-four percent of the sample were single and the remaining 26% were married.

### Instrumentation

Data collection included administration of the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI), Teacher Attitude Scale (TAS) as well as obtaining standard demographic variables (e.g., age, race marital status etc.).

#### Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI)

The Myers-Brigg is a 50 item measure designed to assess characteristic ways in which an individual perceives and makes judgments in their daily life. The MBTI contains 4 separate indices which reflect how an individual perceives and makes judgments. The four indices are: Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, and Judgment-Perception.

Based on an individual's responses they are assigned one level of each of the four indices and the combination forms an individual's "type". These sixteen possible types indicate the primary manner in which an individual perceives incoming information and makes judgments about that information. Each index represents opposite poles of a continuum which all individuals experience, however, one end is more strongly preferred by the individual. Thus, in addition to being assigned one type for each index, respondents are also given a preference score indicating how strongly they endorse that particular type.

Teacher Attitude Scale (TAS)

The TAS was designed by this researcher to assess the individual's attitudes toward relationships with their students. Questions were constructed using Bowlby's attachment theory, and were designed to assess the respondent's feelings about a range of attachment relationship issues.

Respondent's indicated how important each of the 15 items were to them in their relationship with their students. The response set was a 7 point Likert-type scale. A total score was obtained by summing all responses (range= 15-105). The range obtained in this study was 69-101. The higher the score the more important the respondent felt the issues were in relation to the caregiver-child relationship. The instrument showed good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .80 with this data set.

Procedure

All instruments were self-report, administered in a group setting at a large urban university. Subjects were informed that data collected would be used for research. Subjects could refuse without penalty and their data would not be used in analyses. A signed consent

form was obtained for each subject prior to collecting data. Respondents completed demographic questions and were then given the Myers-Brigg and TAS respectively to complete.

## Results

Univariate analysis revealed that the TAS score was significantly related to the Myers-Brigg standardized score on the Sensing-Intuition scale ($r = .43$ $p < .01$). A positive relationship between the TAS and this scale indicates that the higher the individual scored on Intuition, the higher they scored on the TAS (see Table 1). Full personality profiles showed no significant relationship with the TAS total score, although the type that included extraversion and intuition approached statistical significance ($r=.26$, $p=.11$).

A hierarchical regression analysis was performed to assess what role ses and race had (if any) on responses to the TAS. Hierarchical regression determines if the addition of a variable(s) significantly increases the $R^2$ accounted for beyond a previous set of variables (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). However, an initial regression model that included race and sex failed to reach statistical significance (see Table 2). Thus, the hierarchical regression could not be performed. A model that included all three of the variables ( i.e., Race, SES and Sensing-Intuition preference score) yielded a significant model ($F = 3.02$, $p < .05$) However, only the Myers-Briggs intuition preference score reached statistical significance in this model ($F = 5.88$, $p < .05$). The model accounted for 22% of the variance in predicting the TAS score (see Table 3).

## Discussion

This pilot study revealed that student-teacher attitudes towards their relationship with students were related to the intuition component of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. An individual whose preference score for intuition was higher was more likely to have a higher

score on the TAS. Thus intuitive individuals are more likely to value positive relationships with their students.

Attachment theory suggests that individuals who have a history of secure relationships would have internal models that include positive expectations of forming secure relationships with others (Bowlby 1988). Further, these models operate largely out of conscious awareness, thus the individual may not be aware of their perceptions. This description also fits an individual for whom intuition is a primary information processing style. Myers and McCaulley (1985) write that the intuitive individuals rely on processing information and making judgments on an sub-conscious level. However, the lack of relationship with the TAS when the entire personality profile is included as a variable indicates that more factors may be at work in influencing attitudes toward relationships with children.

The nature of this sample and its size make it impossible to make any generalizations to the larger population. However, these data do suggest that the link between attachment relationships, personality and relationships between teacher and student bears further study.

The results were encouraging regarding the TAS. It demonstrated good internal reliability. Yet, it too requires additional testing before it can be utilized as an effective measure of teacher attitudes towards attachment relationships. Specifically, examining how teacher attitudes towards their students influence the child's social/emotional and academic development.

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Table 1.
Correlational Analysis of Teacher Attitude Scale and Selected Variables

| Variable | SES | Race | Sensing-Intuition |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher Attitude | .05 | .27 | .43** |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 2.
Multiple Regression Analysis of Demographic Variables (Step 1 of Hierarchical Regression)

| Variable | Standardized Regression Coefficient | Standard Error | p < |
|---|---|---|---|
| SES | .037 | .171 | .83(ns) |
| Race | 4.85 | 2.95 | .11(ns) |

$R^2$= .08

F=1.39 p < .26

Table 3.
Multiple Regression Analysis of Sensing-Intuition Preference Score and Selected Variables

| Variable | Standardized Regression Coefficient | Standard Error | p < |
|---|---|---|---|
| SES | .063 | .160 | .694(ns) |
| Parental Discipline History | 1.51 | 3.08 | .627(ns) |
| Sensing Intuition Preference Score | .122 | .05 | .05 |

$R^2$= .14

F=3.93 p < .01

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